CNET Review about Fast Cleaner by Kevin Savetz

Spring has sprung and you've upended your house in a cleaning frenzy. Furniture moved, rugs shaken out, and you even dusted your PC case and monitor. But have you paid any attention to its hard drive? As you download, install, and use software, your hard drive invariably becomes littered with junk: temporary files, zero-byte files, log files, duplicate files, and other data that just takes up space and reduces performance. For help finding and removing that space-wasting information, use a clean-up application. We'll look at how to use two utilities, Fast Cleaner and Check Identical Files, to sweep the cobwebs from your hard drive.

clean up your PCBy Kevin Savetz(6/3/02)
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Take out the trash

Fast Cleaner clears many types of extraneous files from your PC. The program is $15 shareware with a 30-day free trial.

When you start Fast Cleaner, you'll see a simple start window. Press the Search button and wait a few moments while the program peruses the contents of your hard drive. When it is done, Fast Cleaner will report the number and total size of the junk files it has found. You can press the Clean button to quickly remove them. By default, those files will be moved to the Recycling Bin, but power users who want more control over the process should press the Details button instead.

Doing so will reveal a list of files that Fast Cleaner suspects aren't worth the bits they've printed on. Scroll down the list to see the names and sizes of each file; you'll notice everything from zero-byte files to multi-megabyte temporary and log files. To remove a file, you can either right-click its name and choose Clean the Selected, or click the file and press the Delete button on your keyboard.

If you're not sure the file is worthless, there are several functions to help you decide. Right-click the file and choose View the Selected to see the file's contents in Notepad, or choose Explore the Selected to see it in Windows Explorer. Choose Properties to open the file's Properties window, which shows when the file was created, modified, and last accessed.

You'll notice a check box to the left of each filename. These let you select multiple files and remove groups of them at once. By default, all of the boxes are checked. As you explore the list of suspect files, uncheck the boxes for any files you want to keep. When you're done, choose "Clean up all checked" from the Actions menu to remove the selected files.

Sort your trash

Selecting files by hand is useful, but can be an onerous, time-consuming task if Fast Cleaner has found hundreds of suspect files. Two features that can speed the process are Filters and Ignores. Filters indicate the types of files that Fast Cleaner will remove based on their filenames. Choose Filters from the Options menu to see the list of built-in filters. Checked items will be removed during cleaning.

You can also create your own filters. Select Customize Filters from the Options menu, then press the Add button. First, the program will ask you to enter a filename. This can be an explicit filename, such as GARBAGE.TMP, or a wildcard, such as TEST* *. (Asterisks in Windows filenames are wildcards and can represent any one or multiple characters.) Press OK; then you'll be asked to enter a short description of the filter rule. Press OK again, and your preference will be saved.

Ignores are exceptions to the rules the filters set up: files you prefer Fast Cleaner to leave on your PC. Choose Ignores from the Options menu to choose among the built-in ignore rules. To add your own, choose Customize Ignores from the Options menu, then press Add. First, the program will ask you to enter a filename. As with filters, this can be an explicit filename or a wildcard pattern. Press OK, then type a description of the Ignore rule.

To delete or not to delete

By default, Fast Cleaner will move worthless files to the Recycle Bin. You can change this behavior by choosing Clean from the Options menu. If you've come to trust Fast Cleaner and have built your own Ignore and Filter rules, you might

want to select Delete Them Directly to have the program simply delete the detritus without a stopover in the Recycle Bin. Or for an extra measure of safety, choose "Move them to backup directory" to have Fast Cleaner move the files rather than delete them. This option will de-clutter your directories, but it won't save disk space until you delete those backed-up files yourself.

You'll notice three other choices under the Clean Options menu. The Exclude System Files, Exclude Hidden Files, and Exclude Read-Only Files options let you specify how picky Fast Cleaner is about special files. By default, system files are off-limits, but hidden and read-only files are fair game for removal.

After you've tweaked Fast Cleaner's settings to your needs, press the Search button again to update the file list, then press Clean to move--or remove--garbage files.

Fast Clean provides easy access to other system maintenance tasks. Look under the Main menu to empty the Recycle Bin or to run Scandisk or Windows' Disk Defragmenter. (If you're using Windows XP or 2000, these links won't work. Choose Enhanced from the Options menu to point Fast Cleaner to the appropriate tools on your system.)

Remove twins

Another spring-cleaning task, and a good way to free up disk space, is to remove duplicate files from your hard drive. After installing dozens of programs, your drive can become cluttered with identical copies of certain files. Check Identical Files (CIF), a $15 shareware tool, will search them out and remove them.

Seeking out and removing duplicate files is a five-step process, and CIF’s interface is divided into five corresponding panes. First, you need to tell the program which drives and directories to search. In the Step 1 pane, point the program to each directory that you want scanned and press the Add to List button. You can select a few folders or select an entire drive for a thorough (and relatively slow) investigation.

Define your directories

In the Step 2 pane, you can refine the list by removing subfolders you don't want searched. If you don't want to scan a particular folder (for instance, a backup directory), highlight it and click the Remove From List button. After you have honed the list of directories to perfection, you can press Store List to save it. The next time you use CIF, press the Retrieve List button to load that list.

Most of the program's business takes place in the Step 3 pane, where it displays the list of duplicate files. Press the Find Duplicates button, and the app will search your hard drive. When it is done, a list of offending files will appear in this pane. Identical files are shown in each row, listed as Dupe #1, Dupe #2, and so on. You may find that some files are duplicated many times over, not always with the same filename. Hover the mouse pointer over a file, and information about that file, including its size and location, is shown in the File Info pane. If you're not sure what's in a file, double-click on its name to open it.

For the fourth step, choose the files you want to remove. Select files by clicking their names in the file list. The files are shown in the order that Check Identical Files found them, not in their order of importance. Don't assume that the files in the Dupe #2 and Dupe #3 columns are better candidates for deletion than the files listed under Dupe #1.

The program offers more efficient ways to select files. To quickly select all of the duplicates within a particular folder, highlight that folder in the folder list pane, then press the Select by Folder button. Type a wildcard, such as *.BAK, in the Mask field, then press the Select Pattern button to highlight files with names that match that pattern.

When you're ready to delete the selected files, press the Delete Dialog button. You'll see a summary of the files that are slated for removal and you are given the option to move the files to the Recycle Bin, move them to a backup folder, or just delete them. If you have a change of heart, press the "Remove selected files from the list" button to take a file from the chopping block. Then press the Yes button to remove the space-wasting files that remain in the list.

A word of warning: If you're not absolutely positive that those duplicate files are unnecessary, leave them alone. Your applications may depend on a file being in a particular place, even though there are a dozen other versions scattered around your hard drive.

Spring clean any time of the year

Other software for cleaning your PC's file system includes Find Junk Files, PC Garbage Remover, Alvilim TempClean, RubbishKiller, and SameSame.

All of these programs can help you find the useless files that clog your PC, but use them with care: you can inadvertently delete or move vital files with any of these tools. So make a backup just in case, then carefully eradicate those

unnecessary files. Before long, your PC will be squeaky clean.

ABOUT AUTHOR:
Kevin Savetz, a frequent contributor to CNET Download.com, has been a freelance computer technology writer for 10 years.